

GRICEAN MAXIMS AS AN ANALYTICAL TOOL IN TRANSLATION STUDIES: QUESTIONS OF ADEQUACY

Rochayah Machali

(rmachali@gmail.com)

*Universitas Islam Malang (Unisma)
Jl. Mayjen Haryono 193, Malang 65144, Indonesia*

Abstract: One of the many interests in translation studies is to study how meaning is rendered in the target language text (TLT). This is often observed in terms of ‘equivalence of meaning’ as it is meaning that is being transferred. Equivalence can occur at any level: word, group, sentence, text, and even pragmatic level. On working at the pragmatic level a translator often has to refer to the (immediate) context in order that his/her translation can be understood by the TL readers. When the resulted translation is then analysed in terms of how the ‘pragmatic meaning’ has been rendered in the TLT, one of the analytical tools that can be used is the Gricean Maxims. In recent years, there have been renewed interests in the studies and researches related to the Gricean maxims. However, none has been concerned with Indonesian context. This article is, therefore, a preliminary inquiry into this area, particularly to see how the maxims can be problematic when we are faced with concepts of politeness.

Key words: translation equivalence, pragmatic, Gricean Maxims, politeness, translation studies, translation theory.

Munday (2012) has seen ‘Translation Studies’ as gathering a greater pace in recent years. The first theorist to define the concept ‘Translation Studies’ is Holmes who briefly describes the discipline as ‘the field of research focusing on the problems of *translating* and *translations* (Holmes in Venuti, 2000: 181, italics added). Holmes suggests that the focus is on both process (translating) and product (translation). In mapping the focus, Holmes distinguishes two branches: pure and applied TS. The ‘pure’ TS is further branched into ‘descrip-

tive translation studies ‘(DTS) and ‘translation theory’ (TTh) while the ‘applied’ TS finds manifestations in areas such as language learning, translator training, translation aids, translation policy and translation criticism. Pym et al. (2008) further investigated and redefined the discipline in the context of multilingualism and multiculturalism in translation studies.

As far as ‘pure’ TS is concerned, two main objectives are set forth: (1) to describe the phenomena of translating and translation(s) as they manifest themselves in the world of our experience, and (2) to establish general principles by means of which these phenomena can be explained and predicted (Venuti, 2000: 184). In this conceptual mapping, translation theory is closely related to translation description. One of the main proponents of this concept is Toury in *‘Descriptive Translation Studies – And Beyond’* (1995: 10), where he has diagrammatically represented Holmes’ map and calls for the development of a properly systematic branch of the discipline. He proposes a three-phase methodology for systematic DTS (Toury, 1995: 36-9 and 102). This is in principle a corpus-based approach, where the ultimate aim is for stating laws of behaviour for translation in general.

It is not my intention here to further focus on the development of DTS. It suffices to say that as the DTS flourishes (see Pym et al., 2008), so do other approaches and theories, such as, ‘Systems theories’, ‘Functional theories of Translation’, ‘Varieties of Cultural Studies’ (in Munday, 2001 and 2012). The list can go on, but the one that is relevant to this paper is one dubbed ‘Discourse and register analysis approaches’ by Munday (2001: 89). Within this approach, there is one by Baker (1992: 217; 2008) who proposes to discuss translation phenomena around the concept of equivalence. Baker looks at equivalence at a series of levels: word, above-word, grammar, thematic structure, cohesion and pragmatic levels.

At the pragmatic level, it is necessary to look at ‘the way utterances are used in communicative situations’ (Baker, 1992: 217; 2008). At such level, translation studies necessarily involve pragmatics. As such, texts (the original and the translated) are necessarily seen and treated as “texts acts”, not as just ‘product’. By viewing a text in this way, we see a text as not merely stating or describing things, but also ‘doing’ things. It fulfils a function (cf. Halliday’s concept of this in his *Functional Grammar*, in Halliday & Mathiessen, 2004). In this paper, ‘function’ is used in a bit more general manner.

PRAGMATICS AND TRANSLATION

Pragmatic analysis and studies are often viewed in terms of notions such as *speech acts*, *felicity conditions*, *Gricean principles and Maxims*, among others. Recently there are renewed interests in the study of Gricean Maxims, and some of the examples are: Franke (2011) who studies aspects of inferences in Gricean maxims, and Dynel (2009) who studies the maxims in relation to politeness. In addition to this, there are also renewed interests in the study of the maxims in relation to translations studies. Some examples include: Atari and Triki (2012) who studies the notion of implicitness in translation and sees the notion in the light of pragmatics, particularly on how flouting is related to presupposition. Another recent study is one by Morini (2008) in his 'Outlining a new linguistic theory of translation', where he discusses Grice's 'cooperative principles' in relation to interpersonal function.

Earlier studies are also worth mentioning, where a number of theorists and analysts have studied relations between Pragmatics and translation, among whom are Hatim and Mason (1990; 1997), Tirkkonen-Condit (1986), Gutt (1991), Baker (1992). Hatim and Mason, particularly in their 1990 book, have discussed the pragmatic dimension of a text (see, for example, chapters 4 and 5). They studied cases of communication breakdown in translation that are resulted from misunderstanding of pragmatic meaning by the translator. The examples cited and compared are those involving mainly Arabic-English.

In a similar way, Tirkkonen-Condit (1986) discusses the same notion from the point of view of global characterization of a text that is supported by the functional criteria and hierarchy within a text. These two criteria are seen as directing the analysis of an utterance and direct readers in reading a text. Therefore, these criteria should also be translator's main considerations when translating a text, ie in viewing the text in its global meaning.

Using a similar line of reasoning, Gutt (1991) views translation in the line of communication theory in general. He particularly focuses on the concept of *relevance* for understanding meaning in the text being translated. To him, a translator should consider the principle of relevance, which he generally defines as *make it adequately relevant to the audience* (Gutt, 1991: 100). This principle is, in fact, one of the Maxims proposed by Grice (see below for further discussion on Gricean Maxims). The notion of *relevance* in translation has

also been discussed by Baker (1992: 225-228), using examples from English-Arabic translation and vice versa. In this paper, I will be using a similar line of reasoning in analysing translations involving English-Indonesian. The Maxims are used as tools for analysing translations and, at the same time, it will be pointed how these Maxims may not be adequate for explaining certain translation phenomena. Differing from Baker, in this paper I will also discuss cases of how the Maxims can be flouted for special effects in translation. Some possible explanation will be offered as to why such flouting occurs and for what purpose.

PRAGMATICS AND GRICE'S MAXIMS IN TRANSLATION STUDIES

Before discussing how the Gricean Maxims can be used as analytical tool in translation studies, it is important first of all to discuss the Maxims in the context of Pragmatics. Baker (1992; 2008) defines Pragmatics as follows.

‘It is the study of language in use. It is the study of meaning, not as generated by the linguistic system but as conveyed and manipulated by participants in a communicative situation.’ (Baker, 1992: 215)

As a study of ‘language in use’, Pragmatics constitutes a discipline that studies meaning uttered by an interlocutor in a communication act. As such, the language used is a ‘unit of meaning’ in the form of a text that the interlocutors are engaged in.

As a unit of meaning, a text has certain important characteristics, among which are: (1) it contains interrelations of meaning; this means that sentences that become the realizations of such meaning are interrelated and do not stand on their own; (2) it has a purpose; sentences that become the realizations of meaning are not a collection of sentences without purpose; (3) it is a form of cooperation that can be mutually understood by the interlocutors involved in a communication.

These general characteristics are manifested in the form of general principles of communication that Grice calls *Co-operative Principle* and the interactants have to consider them in their act of communication (Grice, 1975: 45).

‘Make your conversational *contribution* such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or *direction of the talk exchange* in which you are engaged’ (Grice, 1975: 45, italicization added)

While this principle seems to be applied only to oral exchanges, I believe that it is also applicable to written texts: in translation we are *engaged* in texts acts. The contribution (or no contribution) of interactants (i.e. translators in our context) affects the exchange: how they understand what the source language text does and how they reproduce them in the translated version would determine the direction and nature of the communication. For example, if the source text contains implied meaning, the translator can choose to retain it as such (or not). Thus, when faced with a text such as:

- I. A: There is someone at the door
B: I’m in the bath
A: Ok
(from Widdowson, 1978: 138)

In the text above, it can be understood that A understands that s/he has to open the door (which is the intended *direction of the exchange* in Grice’s term). Both A and B give their required contribution for smooth communication to take place. However, this direction is not made explicit by B, who could have said ‘I am in the bath; *please answer the door*’. However, a translator can choose (or not) to reproduce the implied meaning and makes his/her contribution as such in the translated version. This becomes his/her contribution in the translation.

How much a translator can contribute to this engagement has become a topic and debate in translation. See, for instance, Álvares & Vidal (1996) “Translation, Power, Subversion” or Venuti (1995) in “The Translator’s Invisibility”. In these, the role of the translator and the Power endowed to him/her are discussed in different ways. For example, Venuti discusses whether or not a translation should sound like a translation or whether it should sound like an ‘original’ text. This in turns is intertwined with the debate whether translation should be domesticated or foreignized.

In domestication, the translator can be endowed with the power to include his/her own interpretation in the translation in such a way that the trans-

lated version would sound like an original text. On the other hand, a translator can be very restricted in their translation that certain words and concepts should be retained, mainly because it refers to a specific concept in the original text, e.g. cultural concept or concepts pertaining to particular ideology. Therefore, the translator can contribute or not contribute to the translation, e.g. in domestication s/he can go out of the boundary of the text and as such creates 'translation acts'. In this way he becomes 'invisible', since the translation would sound like an original text. However, a translator may also choose to be visible in the translation, for example when s/he employs foreignization by retaining the foreign words as they are used in the original text. It suffices here to say just this, because this debate is outside of the confine of the current article.

As far as communication is concerned, be it between two languages as in translation or within one particular language, there is a question of 'how much contribution' is required, particularly in domestication when translation is concerned, Grice has set forth a list of Maxims below:

- (1) Quantity: (a) Make sure your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purpose of the exchange); (b) Do not make your contribution more informative than is required
- (2) Quality: 'Try to make your contribution one that is true', specifically: (a) Do not say what you believe to be false ; (b) Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.
- (3) Relevance: Make your contribution relevant to the current exchange.
- (4) Manner: Be perspicuous, specifically: (a) Avoid obscurity of expression; (b) Avoid ambiguity; (c) Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity); (d) Be orderly

The Maxims above are just general principles that have to be considered in communication and in textual exchanges, they are not rules. Sometimes, an interactant or text producer can choose to ignore any of these Maxims, for example in:

- II. It was so hot yesterday, so Elizabeth went out to the video shop to borrow some DVDs.

How can we make sense of ‘hot weather’ and ‘went out to borrow DVDs’? Here, the text producer apparently does not consider the Maxims above or have flouted the Maxims in some way. Therefore some interpretations are possible:

- (1) Elizabeth feels hot and went to the video shop because it is air-conditioned there;
- (2) When the weather is hot, Elizabeth likes watching films (that’s why she went to the DVD shop);
- (3) Yesterday it was so hot, so Elizabeth did not want to stay home (and went out).

It is apparent here about how much (or how little) an interactant considers the Maxims in their mind when producing the sentence. Conversely, the same questions can be asked in translation: how much (or how little) can a translator contribute to such an exchange, making it harder (or easier) for the translated version to be processed by a reader of the translation. In turns, translation analysts and theorists in translation studies will also need to consider these Maxims, to see how they are applied (or not) or even flouted for purposes of producing special effects in the translation.

As an illustration, consider this text, which is a translation produced by a student in a class of translation. The original is in Indonesian (see below).

Translation A for Text III

- III. When a young girl falls in love with a young man, then she informs her parents about the marriage proposal to this idol of her heart.

Upon reading it, we readers may think of it as part of a narrative text about a girl falling in love that has proposed to her boyfriend and then told her parents about it. It is a bit odd for a girl to do the proposing, even in Western culture. So, as an analyst we can have the following interpretations: (1) it is translated from a particular culture that can accept women’s active position (the maxim of ‘relevance’ plays a role here). We can refer to the whole text to see ‘text acts’, i.e. what it is that the SL text says and does (narrating? exhorting?); (2) possibly, the translator has made her/his own intervention and made ‘*more than nec-*

essary contribution’ in the text, thus flouting Maxims (1) and (2). Such flouting is made, possibly for making a point or for exhorting in support of feminism (thus maxim number 2 is flouted and maxim number 4 comes to fore and is also flouted).

Of course, we as analysts have to compare it with the original text and observe meaning equivalence and see ‘how equivalent’ it is to the original intent. It is important to note here that in this paper the term ‘equivalence’ is used simply for convenience for comparing SL text and its translation; it is not used as a theoretical construct or concept (cf. Machali, 1998: 174ff). As such, ‘equivalence’ is relative, as it is influenced by linguistic and cultural factors. That’s said, we can now observe the ‘equivalence’ of meaning of the above translation (Text III) and compare it with the original SL text:

Indonesian (original) text for text III above:

Bila seorang gadis berkenan di hati seorang pemuda, maka ia memberitahu orang-tuanya untuk melamar pujaan hatinya itu. (from *Ragam Budaya Daerah*, 1992; see Machali, 1998: 132-133)

Clearly, at the level of words, in the SL text it’s the boy who is active: although ‘gadis’ is the (grammatical) subject of the sentence, she is not the semantic subject and she is not the doer of the action. In the translation, however, the girl is both the grammatical and semantic subject. Thus she is the active interactant in the text. When the translator was asked about this ‘flouting’, the answer was that she was exhorting for women activism: why can’t women be active in falling in love? The ‘translation act’ goes hand in hand with maxim flouting in this case. (Note: the SL text and its different translations were part of my experiment in my early research on textual perspectives and translation—see Machali, 1998:129ff).

Other cases that do not involve obvious flouting of the Maxims can be seen in the examples below:

IV. SL text: (to the Journalist) – original text in Indonesian

Saudara-saudara, acara ini sudah selesai. Bapak yang mulia dan tamunya hendak menikmati acara yang sifatnya lebih pribadi. Mohon maaf. Press-release akan dibagikan nanti sore secara tertulis.

Juga **amplopnya** sekalian. (*Opera Kecoa*, p. 16, underlining added) (Riantiarno, 1982)-

IV. Translation: English version (only for the underlined part above)

You will get a written press release by this evening and, of course, **a little something extra as a sign of our appreciation for your hard work** (*Cockroach Opera*, p. 106, highlighting added) (Riantiarno, 1992)

As a translation analyst, we can immediately see that the translator has capitalised on the maxim of ‘relevance’: how to make the words ‘amplop (envelope)’ as not a mere cover for a letter (i.e. its referential meaning) but also to make its connotative meaning explicit. This way, it makes it easier for the English readers to process: that it is more than just an envelope. What is more, the translator seems to have considered the maxim ‘manner’ as Grice calls it, particularly ‘avoid ambiguity’. Analysts can of course go further and see a tinge of satire in the phrase ‘appreciation of your hard work’ and therefore see this as a manifestation of flouting in some way. But that’s where the ‘relevance’ becomes important for the English readers, i.e. that in the Indonesian culture ‘bribing’ is represented by the word *amplop* ‘envelope’. The question that remains is how much (or how little) contribution a translator can put in the whole communication exchange. This is often discussed under the topic of ‘Power’ mandated to him/her, which entails how much flouting he/she can do to the Maxims. The mandate here depends very much upon many factors, among which are: the purpose of the translation (including target readers), restrictions from the publisher or from the original writer (see below for such restriction). So, this ‘Power’ can be reinterpreted in terms of Grice’s Maxims above, as discussed below.

HOW MUCH CONTRIBUTION: THE TRANSLATOR’S POWER

It is important first of all to note that I put Power in capital ‘P’ to indicate that it is not something that is ‘given’ in the sense that it is not inherent within the translator. Although it can sometimes be up to the translator to

choose to impose different meaning from its original intent, often it is because of pressure from the publisher or from the original writer who dictate this choice. Thus Power should be seen in this light. The very well-known figure in the debate on translator's Power is Venuti (see 'The Translator's Invisibility', 1995). Obvious examples of such 'Power' as a translation that Baker has put forward (1992:247) are these two texts:

V. Original text: English

[...] Speaking of Sadat, Heikal says: While fully conscious of his shortcomings I hoped that the responsibilities of office would strengthen the positive elements in his character and enable him to overcome the weak ones. The example of Truman was always present in my mind. [...]

The above text was translated into Arabic, and Baker provides a back-translation from Arabic into English, for purposes of comparison:

VB. back-translation from Arabic:

[...] In my mind there was always the example of *the American President Harry Truman, who succeeded Franklin Roosevelt towards the end of World War II. At that time – and after Roosevelt – Truman seemed a rather nondescript/bland and unknown character who could not lead the great human struggle in World War II to its desired and inevitable end.* [...] *I imagined that the same thing could happen to Sadat.* I managed his campaign ...

On comparing the underlined original in V and its 'translation' in italics in VB above, we can immediately see that the translator has the Power or was mandated to add much information into the translation. When viewed in terms of Gricean maxim of Quantity, it is flouted here (i.e. point (b) is flouted). However, when viewed in terms of the maxim *relevance*, we can immediately see that it plays a very important role: the translator seems to have assumed that the readers (i.e. the Arabic readers) do not know much about President Truman to be able to make comparison with the Egyptian president Sadat. So, s/he adds the whole information (printed in italics here) as a background for her/his Ara-

bic readers. In addition, the maxim of *manner* ‘be brief’ was not even considered in favour of *relevance*. Even for *relevance* there is a strong case of judgment in words such as ‘nondescript/bland’ and ‘unknown’ character, but then again it may be due to the back-translation that is beside the point here.

Placing the above case within the framework of ‘translating as political act’, we are faced with an entirely different debate (see Álvares and Vidal, 1996, in ‘Translation, Power, Subversion’). This notion is usually linked to notions such as translator’s (in)visibility. In turns it can also be linked to the ideas of foreignisation and domestication of meaning in translation, which are beyond the topics set for this paper. However, an example is worth mentioning, as an illustration: referring to a case in the wake of the war between England and Argentina over the Falkland Islands. While the Western media used ‘Falkland islands’ as a term in their journalistic reports of the war, Indonesian journalists chose to use the words ‘Malvinas Islands’ (*Kepulauan Malvinas*), a native name given by the Argentinian. This seems to suggest that the journalists sided with Argentina and translated war coverage from English but used ‘Malvinas’ instead of ‘Falkland’. So, the translation in this case has become a political act and the translator’s ‘act’ goes beyond the confine of the written (original) text, i.e. beyond translation proper. For now, it suffices to say that it is possible to look at translator’s Power this way in this context, but in this paper we use the Maxims as an analytical tool, as elaborated before.

THE GRICEAN MAXIMS: QUESTIONS OF ADEQUACY

I mentioned earlier that the purpose of this paper is to explore how the Gricean Maxims can be used as analytical tool in Translation Studies. However, there is one missing piece in the Maxims, i.e. one that can be used to analyse cases of politeness in translation or whether or not the Maxims can be used in considering meaning equivalence involving politeness in texts. Critics of the Gricean Maxims observe that Grice has worked from English in formulating the Maxims, thus failing to account for languages where politeness forms an inherent part of the language system and culture, for examples languages such as Japanese, Chinese, etc. As for Indonesian translation, consider these texts (from a scene in the film “Langitku Rumahku” (My Sky, My Home) (Djarot & Tjahjono, 1991).

A short introduction of the setting: Andri is the younger child in a family who reminds his father to attend a meeting at his school, but the father cannot make it and will ask *Pak Dimik* (the driver)

VI. English translation as subtitles, from Indonesian

Father: I'll ask Dimik then.. who else can go?

Andri grumbles.....

Andri: Dimik, again and again. It's not a good idea that Dimik goes to the meeting. As if I didn't have a father!

In this English version, both the father and child refer to and address the older driver by his name 'Dimik'. While it is acceptable for the father to refer to the driver by name, it would be rude for the child to follow suit. It is culturally anomalous for Andri to do that. In the original Indonesian version the child says 'Pak Dimik' (literally means Mr. Dimik). In cases such as this, perhaps it is best to use foreignisation and use 'Pak'. It is true that for subtitles such as this we will need to use an approach and analogy of analysis that would somehow differ from texts without visual representations.

We can also refer to cases in the translation of Harry Potter, where 'Mr' and 'Mrs' as terms of address are retained (Zulfadli, 2004). Although we do have terms of address such as 'Tuan' and 'Nyonya' for 'Mr' and 'Mrs', the Indonesian translation of Harry Potter retains the original. This was because the publisher dictates such foreignisation, causing readers to go through 'a bumpy road' when reading the translation. What is obvious from these examples is that we need another analytical framework or an additional maxim to analyse translations involving cases of politeness, just so that the translated version does not become culturally anomalous.

Some recent studies on Gricean maxims, e.g. Dynel (2009), have indeed incorporated the notion of politeness into the Gricean framework. However, not much has been done in relation to translation studies, particularly not in the context of Indonesian translation studies.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

From the various cases discussed and exemplified here we can see that Gricean Maxims work as general principles for analysing translation in Translation Studies (as well as for directing translators in translation activities). There are cases that show flouting of these Maxims for purposes of creating special meaning and special effects. It has been shown for the most part that the Maxim of *relevance* seems to play a greater role than other Maxims. The Maxim of *quantity* also plays an important part in some cases and can be intertwined with translator's Power and mandate in translation. However, this is beyond the confine of the current paper. It has also been shown that the Maxims cannot be used as a tool in the texts involving politeness.

I would like to suggest here that while the Maxims can be used as tool for analysing translations, they are not quite suitable as parameters for translator teaching and training. Instead, it is best to use framework of text analysis (see Machali, 1999 chapters 5 and 6).

REFERENCES

- Atari, O. & Triki, M. 2012, Implicitness in Translation: An Exercise in Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis. *Journal of Literary Semantics*, 22 (3): 239-251.
- Baker, M. 1992. *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation*, London: Routledge.
- Djarot, S.R. & Tjahjono, H. 1991. *Langitku Rumahku (My Sky My Home)*. Jakarta: Eka Praya.
- Dynel, M. 2009. Where Cooperation Meets Politeness: Revisiting Politeness Models in View of the Gricean Framework. *Brno Studies in English*, 35 (1): 23-43
- Franke, M. 2011. Quantity Implicatures, Exhaustive Interpretation, and Rational Conversation. *Semantics and Pragmatics*, 4 (1): 1-84.
- Gutt, E. 1991. *Translation and Relevance: Cognition and Context*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

- Grice, H.P. 1975. Logic and Conversation. In P. Cole and J.L. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and Semantics, Vol. 3: Speech Acts* (pp. 41-58). New York, Academic Press.
- Hatim, B. & Mason, I. 1990. *Discourse and the Translator*. London: Longman.
- Hatim B. & Mason, I. 1997. *The Translator and Communicator*. London: Routledge.
- Machali, R. 1998. *Pedoman bagi Penerjemah*. Jakarta: Grasindo
- Machali, R. 1999. Shifts in Discourse Perspective and the Question of Translation Equivalence. *JOTT (Journal of Textlinguistics and Translation)*, 12/1999: 30-46
- Munday, J. 2001. *Introducing Translation Studies*. London: Routledge
- Munday, J. 2012. Translation Studies, *The Year's Work in Critical and Cultural Theory*, 18 (1): 221-228.
- Riantiarno, N. 1982. *Opera Kecoa*. Yogyakarta: Maha Tari.
- Riantiarno, N. 1992. *Cockroach Opera*. Translated by John McGlynn. Jakarta: Lontar Foundation.
- Tirkkonen-Condit, S. 1986. Text Type Markers and Translation Equivalence. In J. House & S. Blum-Kulka (Eds.) *Interlingual and Intercultural Communication: Discourse and Cognition in Translation and Second Language Acquisition Studies*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr.
- Toury, G. 1995. *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond*. Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins.
- Venuti, L. 2000. *The Translation Studies Reader*. London: Routledge.
- Venuti, L. 1995. *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*. London: Routledge
- Zulfadli. 2004. *The Theoretical and Practical Reviews of the Indonesian Version of the Harry Potter Novel*. Unpublished Master's Thesis. Sydney: Linguistics Department, University of New South Wales.